

## Collecting Lepidoptera in Britain during 1977

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Reference has already been made to the running of the m.v. trap at our chalet overlooking the bay. For the first week it produced phenomenal results (*vide Entom. Rec.*, **89**: 314). We were amazed to find a huge concourse of moths on our first morning, July 9th-10th, with all the cartons quite weighed down with the mass of insects, which we estimated to be some 2,300 individuals, comprising 43 species of the macros. By far the largest proportion was some 1,650 *Agrotis exclamationis* L., and just over 500 *Apamea monoglypha* L. These two insects were easily the most numerous throughout the period, constituting over 90% of the total numbers. However, there was a fair assortment of other insects this first night, including four species of the sphinges, notably *Laotoë populi* L., *Smerinthus ocellatus* L., *Deilephila elpenor* L. and no less than a dozen *D. porcellus* L. There was too a single late *Dicranura vinula* L., several *Malacosoma neustria* L., also *Arctia caja* L., *Philudoria potatoria* L., and among the noctuids, a fresh male *Agrotis trux* Hübn., several deep brown *Hadena lepida* Esp., *Apamea lithoxylea* D. & S., many *Cucullia umbratica* L. and a single *Plusia bractea* D. & S.; but not many geometers, which were mainly *Lygris pyraliata* D. & S., *Eupithecia pulchellata* Stephens and *Idea subsericeata* Haworth. The pattern was much the same the next night, also warm with an easterly wind, when we estimated the catch at an even higher figure of some 2,500, with 47 species and at least 2,000 *A. exclamationis*. The chief newcomers included *Thyatira batis* L., *Agrotis vestigialis* Hufn., *Hippocrita jacobaeae* L., many more *H. lepida*, several *H. conspersa* D. & S., some very fine *Ceramica pisi* L., also *Hecatera bicolorata* Hufn., *Plusia pulcherina* L., *Pseudoterpna pruinata* Hufn. and *Perizoma affinitata* Stephens. The three subsequent nights, those of July 11th, 12th and 13th, each produced from 1,500 to 1,750 individuals, with 50 species on the last night, each with much the same pattern of insects as before, but with a few new ones, mostly in singles, such as a worn *Hadena barrettii* Doubleday on the 12th, together with *Amathes ditrapezium* D. & S., the first *Leucania putrescens* Hübn., also *Cucullia asteris* D. & S., a very westerly station for this insect. There were, furthermore, several *Procus versicolor* Borkh., more *Agrotis trux* Hübn. and *Bombycia viminalis* Fab. More *L. putrescens* appeared on the 13th, together with a solitary *Apamea furva* D. & S. Numbers began falling the following three nights to below a thousand up until the 16th, when the wind changed to the west, and the final three nights only produced a total of 40 individuals. The only unusual visitor the last night on July 15th, was a worn female *Hadena bombycina* Hufn. The grand total for the eleven nights was around the 12,000 mark, comprising 98 species of the macros, of which there were nearly

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60 each of *D. porcellus* and *C. umbratica*. Mr. Stewart Coxe and his wife arrived on July 18th at our hotel, staying for nearly a week. He later told me that just after we left, he had several *Plusia chryson* Esp. to light, which appeared quite a fortnight later than its normal date.

Early on July 20th, we set our faces eastwards again and retracing our route through South Wales, we reached Abergavenny in the afternoon and went up the picturesque Lantory Valley to view the ancient Abbey. Little was on the wing, however, and we proceeded via Monmouth along the Wye Valley to Tintern, where the Beaufort Hotel was once more our headquarters as it had been on a number of previous visits to this well-known region, but conditions were far from propitious and we did no collecting. Leaving Tintern early on July 21st, we made our way over the Severn Bridge once more along the M4, and were back in Surrey by the early afternoon after what had proved a most interesting and quite a profitable couple of weeks in the West.

It was still quite warm in the upper 70's when we got back and the thermometer topped 80°F. in the shade on July 23rd, but it had dropped considerably when Mr. Messenger and I were once more in the Chiddingfold area on the 24th. This did not deter plenty of *Argynnis paphia* L. of both sexes from patronising thistle heads in King's Park Wood that afternoon. In fact they were hardly less plentiful in this region, than they were in 1976 when this species was really in spate. There was also quite a number of *Limenitis camilla* L. sailing about, still in good order, with many *Maniola jurtina* L. and lots of *T. sylvestris*. I was in Alice Holt Forest with Dr. J. Holmes and Mr. D. Young on the 25th, but it was dull and rainy and no *Apatura iris* L. were on the wing, though this grand insect had been out for at least ten days in that noted locality.

The next day, July 26th, I flew to northern Italy, near Lake Garda, returning on August 7th to find summer was still with us with the temperature still above 70°F.; but it was once more dull when I revisited Alice Holt on the 9th and again met Dr. Holmes, this time in company with Dr. Fred Goodliffe. In spite of the somewhat overcast conditions, quite a lot of butterflies were flying, including *L. camilla*, *A. hyperantus*, lots of *M. tithonus* and quite a number of *Thecla quercus* L. *Pieris napi* L. was also quite numerous, but searching shallows failed to disclose any ova or small larvae of *A. iris*. The warm and fine weather continued during the second week of August, but little was on the move on White Down, near Gomshall, on the 12th, and it was surprising not to see *Lysandra coridon* Poda as yet. The next day, *Polygonia c-album* L. and *Celastrina argiolus* were flying in Mr. Messenger's garden at Witley. This blue was having a very good second emergence. After the fine days of the first half of August, a dull and wet period set in during the third week, but it was reasonably fine when I visited Pewley Down, outside Guildford, on the 21st. *L. coridon* was flying in fair plenty and still quite

fresh, as it had appeared over a month later there than in 1976. It warmed up considerably to usher in the last week of the month, when *Inachis io* L. appeared in quantity, mainly on buddleias, in many parts of the south of England, and not least in my garden at Horsell

On August 26th, I once more set out towards the west with my first stop near Blandford to stay with my relatives. Conditions were quite congenial on the 27th when we visited Stourhead, near Mere, but nothing of note was flying in the huge estate and garden. However, many whites were to be seen the following morning of the 28th, especially *P. napi*, both on Bulbarrow Down and near Hod Hill, and still more later that day in the garden of Mr. N. G. Wykes at Uploders, near Bridport, but there seemed at this time to be very few Nymphalines or Satyrids. The next morning, August 29th, I motored via Dorchester and on to Bridport and Honiton to Exeter, taking the new by-pass and fast double highway to Plymouth and the Saltash Bridge. Then by-passing Bodmin I was not long in getting through Truro, finally reaching Mullion in the late afternoon. My haven was once more the Mullion Cove Hotel, which had been so rewarding for insects in June 1974 and August 1976. And this visit proved no less fruitful, since again I was able to run my m.v. trap in front of the hotel cliff. That evening, Mr. Barry Goater who was staying on the Lizard, called for me and conducted me to a sandy beach in that area, where after assiduous searching with torch and lamp we managed to locate a couple of *Luperina nickerlii leechi* Goater at rest on short herbage, with a few *Agrotis vestigialis* Hufn., but the night was windy and cool and far from propitious. Dull conditions supervened on the 30th, and nothing of note appeared on Goonhilly Down or near Coverack in the afternoon, and my only visitors to lights in Poldhu Cove that evening were *Luperina testacea* D. & S. and *Amathes xanthographa* D. & S. However, the last day of the month, the 31st, seemed much more productive. Several *Eumenis semele* L. were flying on Goonhilly, which has largely recovered from the great fires of 1976. The Cornish Heath (*Erica vagans*) was at its best and in full bloom in great clusters on the sides of most roads. There were still a good many *M. tithonus* and a few worn *Pararge megera* on the wing. Barry Goater called for me again towards dusk and we revisited our former locality under ideal conditions. This time we found *leechi* at rest fairly commonly, with both sexes in almost equal numbers and some even drying their wings, again with several *A. vestigialis*, a few *L. testacea* and a single *Pyrameis cardui* L. *Leechi*, this newly-discovered race of *L. nickerlii* Freyer, has much kinship with the form *gueneii* Doubleday, now found in several localities among sandhills on the North Welsh coast. But their counterpart in Kerry, *knilli* Boursin, has quite a different type of terrain, being apparently a denizen of steep cliffs where it comes to light freely unlike the two other forms referred to, so that it is debatable if more than one species is involved.

September opened with very dull and rainy conditions, and no outdoor collecting was possible by day on the 1st. It

was generally brighter the next day when I was once more on Goonhilly, but only a few *P. napi* were observed. As already mentioned, I had facilities to run my m.v. trap for the five nights and though results were not nearly so spectacular in this locality as for a similar period just a year previously in 1976, yet some quite interesting visitors were among 275 individuals and 28 species of macros. The first night on August 29th produced some quite fresh *Euxoa obelisca* D. & S., with a couple of dozen *L. testacea* of every variety, including some very dark examples. Among only 15 visitors on the 30th, was a fine male *Lasiocampa trifolii* D. & S. of the intense brown form with the discal white eye-spots very lanceolate. There was also *Arctia caja* L. and *Euschesis interjecta* Hübn. The first *Eilema caniola* Hübn. appeared on the 31st with *Hepialus sylvina* L. A fine *Cryphia muralis* Forst was a visitor on September 1st, with further *E. obelisca* and a single *Eupithecia phoeniceata* Mabilie, *Tholera cespitis* D. & S., *Caradrina ambigua* D. & S., while *Scopula promultata* Guen. were newcomers on my last night, the 2nd. There was also again a spate of *L. testacea*, a lot of *Euschesis comes* Hübn., and a further *E. caniola*.

On September 3rd I left Mullion, and retracing my earlier route, reached Portland via Abbotsbury in the late afternoon. I surveyed some of the open ground but only a few Whites were on the wing. The Pennsylvania Castle Hotel was my haven, as it had been on many previous occasions. I ran my m.v. trap on the lawn overlooking the east-facing cliff, but only 36 moths from eleven species favoured it. These included *Malacosoma neustria* L., *Plusia gamma* L., a single *Ennomos quercinaria* Hufn. and *H. sylvina* L. The commonest species was *Caradrina ambigua* D. & S., which seemed to be in abundance almost everywhere in the south throughout this period and well into the autumn. I spent the morning of September 4th in bright sunshine on the open ground towards the prison on Portland, where many *Pieris rapae* L. were flying with quite an assortment of *Lysandra coridon* Poda, mostly males in still quite fresh condition but with no variation apparent. I then made my way, via Weymouth and Bere Regis, to Wimborne and on to the New Forest, where I called on Mr. Gilbert Nixon and Mr. Donald Russwurm, but only a few Whites were flying in their respective gardens near Brockenhurst. That evening I was back in Surrey, after what had been a most interesting trip over the August Bank Holiday period.

Temperatures kept up in the upper 60's for the most part for the first half of September, but reached 72°F. in the shade when I revisited the Chiddingfold district after quite an interval on the 11th, but only the common Pierids seemed to be about. However, there were several *Pyrameis atalanta* L. in Mr. J. Messenger's garden at Witley, with once more *Celastrina argiolus* L. The following afternoon I was on Ranmore Common, also in warmth and sunshine. There I met Mr. Richard Fairclough, who had taken a female *Colias croceus* Fourc. there the previous week, quite a rarity nowa-

days. There was a good showing of *Lycandra bellargus* Rott., though some were well past their best. *P. icarus* was also in fair numbers, as was *Maniola jurtina* L. with plenty of fresh females, and that local geometer *Aspitates gilvaria* D. & S. was flying freely on the slopes. It was a good deal cooler when I set out for Kent on September 16th, making my headquarters in Ashford. *P. rapae* was much in evidence the next morning in Hoad's Wood, but little was flying near Folkestone later that day. I was in the Orlestone Woods after dark, but again there was a paucity of visitors to light, only a few geometers, mainly late *Idaea aversata* L. and *Deuteronomos alniaria* L. Posts at Dungeness on the morning of the 18th were virtually blank, as was also the toadflax, with no larvae of *Calophasia lunula* Hufn. forthcoming. Nor did Mr. Michael Tweedie's garden near Rye yield anything of note that afternoon. Returning to Surrey on September 19th under much cooler conditions, it warmed up considerably during the last ten days of the month, with quite a number of the Vanessids appearing on the michaelmas daisies. There was quite a good showing of *Aglais urticae* L., with an occasional *P. atalanta* and *Polygonia c-album* L. The temperature rose to 72°F. on September 27th, and throughout almost the whole of October, a most congenial month, did not fall below 60°F. by day, sometimes reaching the upper 60's. The Vanessids were prevalent on the daisies until they were over just before the end of October, while the moths during the early part of the autumn were quite plentiful; in particular, *Omphaloscelis lunosa* Haworth, *Aporophylla nigra* Haworth, and quite a few *A. lutulenta* D. & S. to light in Surrey, with the ever present *Caradrina ambigua* D. & S. which lasted in exceptional numbers all through the late summer until well into October. But none of the substantial autumn migration came my way, except for a few *Agrotis ypsilon* Hufn. On October 11th, I paid a final visit to Pewley Down, but failed to find any larvae of *Eupithecia pimpinellata* Hüb., which were very prevalent there in 1976 on their foodplant, the burnet saxifrage. *Aglais urticae* was still on the wing there. November started with a good many very mild days, with the thermometer sometimes topping 60°F., as it did when I went to the downs near Gomshall on the 8th, but the only visitors to my Heath light were a few *Poecilocampa populi* L. And there was similar comparative warmth when I revisited Kent on the 11th, but the season was virtually over in those parts and no lepidoptera were forthcoming either near Folkestone or in the Ham Street area. Little came to light for the rest of the month, which provided quite a cool period in its final ten days. However, December proved again very mild with the temperature often in the upper 50's.

The year 1977, which ended on a comparatively cool note, was generally considered to be fairly lean and late, with numbers of insects coming to light in most parts well below the average. Migrants were by no means numerous, most only being recorded in early March and late October.